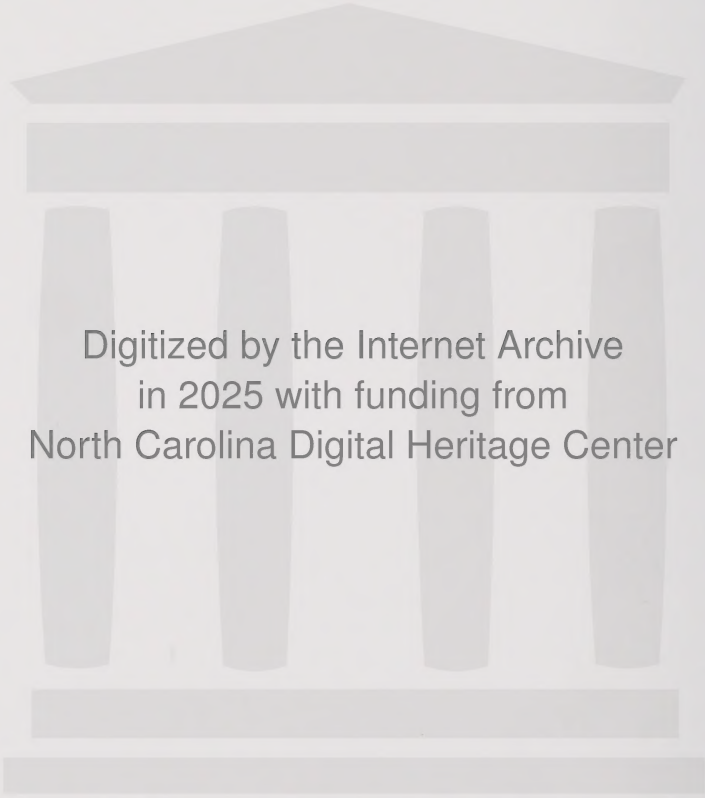
SIGNET

QUEENS UNIVERSITY
ARTS AND LITERARY
MAGAZINE

2024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Maddy Leone

Genre Dividers
Maddy Leone

Faculty Advisor
Melissa Gamez

Hi everyone,

Welcome to the 2024 edition of *Signet*! You're about to read a collection of poetry, prose, visual art pieces, and music created by our student body. Our team has spent the past semester vetting, proofreading, formatting, and designing this magazine so we may celebrate the creativity of our student body. It's been a true labor of love, which we are excited to share with you.

I want to thank the members of our editorial staff who put hours and hours into making this publication amazing. I want to thank our design team as well, who put great effort and skill into designing the entire magazine. You should all be proud of what you've done, and I can't state how much I appreciate your contributions. I'll also thank Professor Renfroe, our editorial advisor, and Professor Gamez, advisor for the design class.

The most important group in the making of this magazine is, as always, our student body. Without you there would be no point in a magazine whatsoever. This book would be empty if not for your creative efforts and your confidence in sharing them. And all our efforts would be meaningless if not for our readers, who bring life to what we do.

Sincerely,
Connor Lindsay, Senior Editor

Hello Readers,

As Art Director of this year's *Signet*, I would like to personally thank you for picking up this year's issue. Throughout this book, you will find remarkable pieces of work done by our students who have exemplified the creativity that comes from Queens. The students of the GDN 215 class stepped up and put their all into every aspect of this book, from the designs of the covers to the layout of the pages themselves. I would also like to personally thank Professor Gamez for supporting everyone in their processes and for being our backbone throughout this journey.

Sincerely,
Maddy Leone

THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF SIGNET

60 This year marks the 60th anniversary of this publication under its current name, *Signet*. But the magazine existed in a myriad of forms before that. For decades preceding 1964, we published under the names *The Princess*, *The Quill*, *The Queens Quill*, and several other titles created by students of generations past. This is the 60th anniversary of using the name *Signet*, and the Editorial Design team of this year's issue decided to pay homage to the original *Signet's* cover design by also using a vertical masthead. We hope the design choices we made for this year's issue will be an excellent representative of what *Signet* is today.

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Spotlight Interview: Darryl White

Omani Gaines

Can you introduce yourself?

Darryl White, I am the assistant dean for Diversity Inclusion Community Engagement.

You hold the rank of Command Sergeant Major, the highest rank in the Army. How was the transition personally from the military to working with students for you?

It was a pretty easy transition, you know, a lot of soldiers in the military are young, college age, and because so much of my time was done in the Army Reserves, it was an easy transition from going to doing that to coming back. You know, working my regular job I had a chance to talk with a lot of those young soldiers in the military, so it was kinda easy just to transition back.

You started your role as Assistant Dean of Diversity at Queens in November of 2016. What made you want to take on this position?

So, first of all, I'm a Queens alum, and I had been working at my previous job with Habitat for Humanity for 22 years and was loving what I was doing there. But when I heard of this role, I thought it could be cool to come back to my alma mater. When I was a student here, there was no such thing as DEI. There was very little diversity here on campus, and it was really just about being able to come back and do that work in 2016, which I think was a pivotal year for a lot of things related to DEI.

How do you feel your role here impacts students?

Well, I mean, it impacts students a lot. Because when you think about where we come from, you know, the students come from their communities where they probably didn't have a whole lot of opportunities to make their own decisions about who they want to be, what kind of value they want to have, everything's been thought of for them. Also, probably for a lot of our students,

you know, everybody who they hung around with in their communities looks like them and thought like them, and so I think just being able to come here and know that you can actually coexist with people who have differences and different perspectives on things or who come from different walks of life is important. So yeah, just being able to prepare them for the real world after they leave college, I think that's where the biggest impact comes in; it's just like kind of how do you, instead of shying away from people who are different, engage with them.

So you graduated from Queens in 1992, which was one of the first fully co-ed classes at Queens University. Did you and other young men at the time have difficulty adjusting to the formally all-woman campus, being one of the first to make the transition?

Transitioning into the campus, which used to be full of women, was pretty easy; I think a lot of the people who were there appreciated having us integrate with them. I also think it was kinda intentional when they decided to bring men here. We had basketball players, soccer players, tennis players, and so on, so I think most of the men who came here were all athletes, so we were all really close. But I think everybody just appreciated us being there because we brought all the excitement with the sports and the diversity with men. I think it was a welcomed sight for a lot of people.

In the future, do you think there are any more groups or clubs to consider bringing into DICE that can represent more students?

I think, you know, in terms of clubs here, they're mostly student-run clubs except for, like, L.E.A.D.. L.E.A.D. is specifically focused on the retention of students and, you know, just helping students acclimate to college a little bit easier, but other types of clubs like BSU and LASO are student-led clubs. I think it would have to be where a student comes along and says, "I have this identity, but there's no club that supports me," and so they want to start their club, but I don't really see us having any specific clubs that we would say we're definitely going to bring on.

You worked as Vice President of Family Services at Habitat for Humanity for 22 years and are currently serving as a board member. How has working with this

company for so long aided your mission for DICE?

Well, so in working at Habitat, we serve a lot of people from all over the world; I mean, you have people who move here, they've established themselves here, and then they come through Habitat to buy a home. So over that period of time, I developed a real comfort level of being able to, like, you know, just engage with people who are different even if they didn't speak fluent English, so I think that really helped me a lot. Also, a lot of the families who are getting homes through Habitat had children or, you know, were young adults, so I would always engage with them as well. I think all of those things really helped me to think about how I would do this work here. And lastly, I would say that because Habitat is a non-profit, you know, the community engagement side of what I do here really helps me to understand a lot more about nonprofits and all the needs out there, and so it's just helpful when we think about like how we do service work and how we engage with the community.

Favorite Club in DICE? (be honest)

My favorite club at DICE? BSU. Yeah, that one was pretty easy; I mean, there are several clubs I like. I definitely like what LASO is doing as well, but BSU is, you know, is what resonates most with me, and I am the advisor for BSU, so yeah.

What does the word inclusion mean to you?

Inclusion means truly inviting people's ideas, their opinions, all that they actually have to offer, you know, just different experiences that people have. So, truly being intentional about inviting that into what I'm doing as opposed to just saying, "Well, you know you're here, and it's up to you to figure out how to include yourself," you know I have to be intentional in terms of coming to you and saying you know, "how can you give us some input on some things" or "how can you come and be a part of what we're doing here" so it's that intentional act that you have to reach out to people and offer them opportunities to come in and be a part of something.

POETRY

Even God Feels Heavy Sometimes

Emiliano B

My body is a forgotten temple.

The halls are weed-ridden and full of vermin
who fight to consume each other for nourishment.
Sunbeams burst through broken windows,
illuminating the empty offering bowls
and former rooms of forsaken acolytes.
Their love was for a sleeping god;
hymns were never loud enough to wake me.
Each breath I take is full of dust and
spiders spinning webs in my ribcage,
each crack in the ceiling
a splinter in the bones.
I'm the final worshiper, a failing caretaker
who can never keep up with the deterioration—
but the only thing keeping myself from absolute ruin.
In a sparse act of self-devotion
the head is bowed, eyes stitched shut,
arms outstretched and turned toward heaven.
With all the dryness in my lungs
I force a guttural, animal sound
like the sacrifices never asked for but freely given.

My voice is lifted once again.

Ode to My Bookshelf

Emiliano B

My sturdy, noble friend,
a structure of lightly-stained
birch boards held together
by nails, glue, and prayers.

Always with a coat of dust
on your highest shelves
looking almost fluffy,
almost sweet—
but if I were to kiss you
I'd inhale filth and sneeze.

Your planks bare the burden
of stories about fictional lands
and histories of tangible pain,
heaving my emotions put to ink
and the words from which
I've learned everything
about how to cry and breathe.

How you hold so firmly
the calavera my cousin painted me,
her letter for my last birthday
tucked between the pages of a well-read
Open Veins of Latin America,
a book that broke and healed me all the same.

You, the pillars of life,
who cradle my memories
with flat and tender palms
that give stability to my knowledge
like a wise, wooden woman;
a force just as mighty
as the tree you once came from.

Drinking Coke out of Paper Coffee Cups

Kandra Bittner

Cause that's all they gave me
And there is lipstick on the rim
Because I started wearing lipstick more often
And I started wearing eyeliner the way I wanted to
Because I stopped caring what they would think
I was just me
And I liked drinking coke out of paper coffee cups
And I liked that the math was hard, and the writing was easy
I liked that my friends felt like a home
And that I called my mom everyday
And to answer your question
Yes, I'm still me
I overly talk about weird things
And I haven't stopped singing
And I still cross the road without looking both ways
And I know that that drove you insane
I know it drove you insane when I did things without a good reason
I still do that too
And I'm sorry I never stayed in touch
I had things to do
But I still remember you
I still miss you and think about how I changed because of you
And not in a bad way but you changed my point of view
I think I like drinking coke out of paper coffee cups because of you

He Who Is Humanity

Jenna Cockrell

He had fallen.
Brothers and sisters watching,
Watching, they believed there was nothing in common.
Common disgrace of his Father, his God mocking.

Mocking brothers and sisters watching,
Watching in the shadows cowering.
Cowering from a humanity that was spawning,
Spawning within the empowering.

Empowering watching, in the shadows, cowering.
Cowering from the one who embodied humanity.
Humanity cut out of the soldier since the devouring,
Devouring the man as he had with Christianity.

Christianity, cowering from the one who embodied humanity.
Humanity was enough; he was the one.
The one to break him out of this insanity.
Insanity, however, had to be redone.

Redone humanity was enough; he was the one,
The one to make him shed his armor.
Armor that was supposed to never be undone.
Undone he did become, now half a hair smarter.

Smarter is the one to make him shed his armor.
Armor discarded with no caution.
Caution would only take him farther.
Oh, how he had fallen.

After "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver

Daquinua Craig

Soft, feathered beings, colored black and white
with wind on your wings, or feet on the ground,
you used to scare me, with teeth as sharp as night
and vocal chords that made a honking sound.
I read about you once, and then was taken
up with awe. And in my darkest hour,
I felt that, in that moment, I was wakened,
sent to blooming like something of a flower.
And so, now made anew, I took to writing
whenever I could, about the great outside
world, no matter how frightening.
I was, for once, at peace, and then realized—
you, wild geese, were calling to me in song,
announcing my place in the world all along.

fresh meat

Daquinua Craig

before i knew her name,
desire showed her teeth to me,
bared and pale, not yet wet with my blood;
she gave me time to flee before she pounced,
but i stayed there, curious for her touch;
i let her have me, infect me,
so that i could forget myself;
in turn, i learned how alluring it was:
being consumed by someone other than i;
cup overflowing with ecstacy,
we drank until my lips were sore;
but it was never enough,
never enough;

Ode to Honey

Daquinua Craig

Oh golden child of nectar,
smooth and succulent
product of many a flower
carpented by many a bee,
but you are the sole offspring.
Blessed with the power of healing,
disease falls at your feet as the
goodness of you glides down
the throats of the weary.
Countless cultures give you their praise—
you are the sweetness that connects
us all.

This Old House

Jocelyn Hunter

Black,
smoke rises from the fire which burned
this old house down.
Like death, it burns
our minds as we breathe in that same smoke.
Crows—fly all around us when we stand at this spot
that once meant something.
Dusk falls upon us once more

White,
sheets on this bed I have slept in for months
yet here I feel so alive.
Pure innocence.
The smoke clears and I see the sky
this fire burned out long ago.

Drowning in Poetry

Jaylen Jones

I
In a library,
the pages are filled with dust
and a lust for knowledge.
Breathe in its dry silence
and listen for the voices of history, mystery, and tragedy.
Smell the sharp ink on wrinkled pages,
ride the overlooked ocean of stories.
Don't disrespect it or it'll drown you in delirium.
On its ocean floor, I found the souls of lovers,
waterlogged, clutching onto each other's spines.

II
They reminded me of the couple under a willow tree.
Caged in its yellow drop branches
one on top of each other, one reading love
and the other, how to cure toxic thoughts.
Here and there squirrels and babies' footsteps cut
through their silence.
A girl with caramel skin and chocolate puffs tripped over a pebble.
Silver tears of fear and confusion caressed her cheeks,
behind her, her father and mother lifted the child to the clouds
and squeezed until her whines turned into giggles.
The youthful couple smiled at the glimpse into a future
and returned to their books.

III
The sun envied the couple's light so he tried to blind them.
The willow loved love, did anything to keep it close;
but company tended to slip through her golden fingers
and loneliness crawled through her bark like aphids.
She thought, with the help of the wind, she could create shade.
Her arms swung through the breeze and the sun laughed.
Sage-eyed leaves could never cover me, the sun spat.
The sun sweltered when he lost the love of the moon
And banished himself to the other side of the sky.

The willow grew tired of his jealousy. Her roots dug deeper
into the earth. The lovers rested
on her trunk.
The night's breeze
Blew them home.
But occasionally,
they returned
when the world
was too bright
to bear.

Sonnet 11:11

Jaylen Jones

You are the cruelest joke the universe
will play when we part. In a purple room
your cold fleeting heart. Losing heat like dusk.
Wrinkled hands are rattling, get a nurse!
The sound of old sultry strings is a curse.
Songs won't stop playing on the radio.
I wrote a complaint to the talk show host,
But I can't spell like I used to.

Breathe, stop searching for perfect reflections
in a pearl. Loneliness is for the meek.
Skate like you used to; you're only 72.
Life shouldn't be wasted on cheap tickets
to the past. Remember earth isn't doomed
And that the next life comes too fast.

Alive

Emma Karwoski

I do not wish to die.

No, of course not.

I wish to live.

I want to sit on a plain of green, feel the wind on my cheeks.

I want to love someone so wholly that nothing else exists.

I want someone to worship the curve of my hip, the lines on my arms,

to make me feel loved.

I wish to live so badly it hurts.

So badly it makes me yearn for blood down my wrists and a rope around my neck,

just so I may feel the fear.

So badly do I wish to watch you mourn.

To watch you paralyzed with grief,

because then I would feel alive.

God, I do not want to live.

I want to feel alive.

Magic Touch

Nolan Kehrli

Let me wash your feet.
Please, let me show you how much I love you, let me show you that I am beneath you.
Let me wash your feet.

Allow me to run the gravel of the calloused pads of my thumbs over your eyes
Your lashes caught in the grooves of my fingerprints like a record
Allow me to hear the song of your pain, I beg you
Allow me to grant you sight. I don't want you stuck in the dark.

Let me help you up
Take my hand in yours and let me fall to the ground trying to lift you up.
You deserve everything, let me lift you from the tomb of your own head.
Let me help you.

May I cure your illness?
May I wash the green away from your brow, dip a cloth in warm water and brush away ailments?
May I help you breathe clearly?
I want you to belt with your full chest, may I give you my air, so you stop coughing and sing?

Please let me calm your storm.
Please, I'll turn my Brita into a wine cooler, stay.
Sleep in my room, I'll sleep on the opposite end, just please.
Please be you as freely as possible, I will be as little as I can. I'll spare you my disgusting touch.

Bones of Summer

Connor Lindsay

Little bones, brittle, cold, left in the wood;
not clean, but scratched and gnawed among the leaves
support no skin nor bark, no sap nor blood.
Rough-hewn white branches for the fire to breathe.

Who were they once, before life took its leave?
What canopies and castles did they make?
Did they know they would fall, or just believe
the forest only gives, and never takes?

They must think now, those bones, that their mistake
was believing they'd never touch the ground:
hiding beneath their bodies till they break,
living in denial until they're drowned

beneath dusk's murky pond, but hear the sound
of twilight fish and birds of autumn's dawn.
The bones of summer, picked and white, are found
by fall's sentinels, dead but not quite gone.

To warmer climes and living sun we're drawn
to live forever if we only could,
yet still in death branches and bones live on.
Season's change can't change our personhood.

Locusts

Connor Lindsay

They came after the rains had stopped,
when air and earth both felt the drought
and all our fields shone brown-gold, ripe with crops.

They swarmed in angry, hungry clouds
above our heads. Sharp scrambling sounds
rose as they descended. All vibrance drowns

in the shadow of greed and hate,
desperate creatures laying waste
to all the seeds summer had sown. The fates

of those they leave behind dry up,
an apple tree chopped at the stump:
nothing left standing when the locusts corrupt.

Our fields are empty chasms now,
the dirt is ash, unfit to plow.
We turn to other lands, but not to sow.

We join the cloud of locusts, hear
our unmistakable thrum, fear
the day we raze your hopes and dreams. It's near.

I Wish Her Love Could Come True

Erin Naramore

I wish her love could come true
I want him to smile at her when she makes that face.
That cute face where her cheeks get pink, her eyes soften,
and she bites the inside of her right cheek; subconsciously reacting
to the sight of her beloved.
I can tell just by looking at her,
as I thought, my love is…

A one-sided love,
is nothing but pain.
I just want her to be happy,
I just want to see her smile,
no matter what it takes.
Even if it means watching her
as she dreams about him.
Listening to her gush about him.
Holding her smooth hands and warm cheeks,
as I tell her how,
any guy would be lucky to have her.

Comforting her, when she's lonely.
Interlocking my fingers with hers,
laying with me in my bed,
looking deeply and lovingly in my eyes,
her face so close to mine; feeling her hot breath.
As she tells me,
"I wish you were a boy."

So I cut my hair,
and cover up my femininity with baggy clothes.
She calls me cute, and keeps looking at the boy,
with the same hairstyle as me.

I try to convince myself that,
as long as she's happy,
I'm happy; even though she will never

feel for me, the way she feels for him.
I wish her love could come true.
But why can't it come true with me?

A Child's Response to the Woes of a Marriage

Anna Julia Vissioli Rodrigues

Inspired by Chad Abushanab

In my young eyes, we were a perfect family.
We only had love. I never even thought of solace.

With the move came bickering between the adults.
They demanded so much, yet I started providing solace.

When their bickering turned to wars, I hid.
Writhed and twisted, desperate for solace.

One night, the word divorce was uttered.
He grew spiteful. There was never a chance for solace.

Years later, his unfeasible demands turned to me.
His cruel words gashed and slashed. I cried solace.

Our home was slowly rebuilt with eggshells.
No room, space, nor corner left for a trace of solace.

As an adult, I grew resentful. Why wouldn't he stop
and she leave? Why did they keep me from solace?

Suddenly, the word divorce transformed.
It went from a word to a possibility for solace.

He battled against it and threw bombs to cease it.
He fought a losing war against yearners for solace.

Once it was delivered, we breathed. The eggshells
Became diamonds and we were gifted with sweet solace.

Excuse My Tongue

Anna Julia Vissioli Rodrigues

Inspired by Marcus Jackson's "Pardon My Heart."

Excuse my tongue if it struggles, persistent.
It doesn't know any better. Its distant

origins are too different, and they clash
against each other over and over in the bash

of two wrestlers, of an alligator spinning
with a deer in its teeth; the poor thing barely clinging

to life. Excuse my tongue, it clumsily carries three:
Portuguese, English, and Spanish. I must plead

with you to excuse my tongue when it falters,
splutters, and halts because it contains transporters,

historians, farmers, and artists carved out of my blood,
bone, and ancestors branded with colorful flags. A dud

tongue is what I have. Excuse my tongue when it snaps,
whacks you across the head when it finally collapses

into chunks and wedges, and you are unfortunate enough
to see my temper tantrum. Excuse my tongue when it's gruff

and sniveling because it's desperate to be understood
by anyone. My heart's thinner than greasewood

as I stare at your attention extracting away
from me. I know I annoy you. Speaking should be child's play,

but my tongue is faulty. Excuse my tongue as it breaks
faster than I can glue it together into falling flakes.

The invisible string theory

Sydney Smith

To know you are tethered to me with a thin string
So small that it's invisible
But so long that we may never see each other again

This string pulls at my lowest points
Reminding me that I am without you

But I'm able to hide it
Invisibly so
Although my string aches and pulls
I must leave it
So that I can form a new string

A string that won't leave and that can be knit through my soul
A string that will love and stay with me
A string that is invisible but cannot be cut

One day I must cut the string that you sewed into me
But for now I will let it stay
As I heal from the wound you cut,
Awaiting a new string to be sewn into my heart

Birthday

Emily Walter

After "Halloween" by Chad Abushanab

For my birthday this year, I'll be a girl.
I won't get looks when my knees poke out of
the bottom of my skirt or wear my curls

like a young Shirley Temple. I can love
makeup and not yet be told I look false
with it on. An idea that goes above—

night will be scary just because it's dark
and not for the reasons that make women
tuck keys between their knuckles when they walk

down the street. Clothes won't need to be hidden
from my parents before I leave the house.
Go change, my dad would say, a condition

said that makes girls think that shoulders shout
for unwanted attention—the short bloom
from girl to woman before blood pounces.

There are no expectations—that doom—
on my birthday, I will not feel the gloom
I do partaking in cake with a spoon.

When in Front of a Crowd

Emily Walter

After "When out of Love" by Marcus Jackson

You're a ruby-throated hummingbird–able to fly
backward from where you once were and knowing that
you are being watched
like you have a mortal wound across your neck.

Your stomach is the feeling of falling
in your dreams, except you never wake up.
Your memory is a rolling marble
being chased by a toddler downhill.

The light is a traitor to your exposed skin
like winter's sun on a snowball.
You're a naked gladiator
dropped in a lion's den and you begin to flee,

forgetting that, as per usual, they were
toothless and clawless the whole time.

I hope you feel the ghost of my ghost every once in a while. A negative space, a hollow sound in a light hallway. A stillness in the dancing of your someone's eyes,

a flicker of remembered enchantment, familiar but strange and too far off to be sure and then away.

I hope you miss me long after the warmth of the weight of me has left the curve of your neck, the slope of your belly, the crook of your knee where you have scars and scrapes from boyhood. Release my sigh from the creak of your bones, comb my scent from your hair and wash all of the shirts that I borrowed in the dark,

the damp nights, when so gently the heat from your skin

bid mine closer to bare all its secrets.

"a haunting"

Kellie Williams

I know that I am born to sing,
born to smile, born to die;
no matter if I fear,
if I am shamed, how hard I pray.
I am touched and I am touching
(both at once, so I must not withdraw when wounded)

"reminders"

Kellie Williams

FICTION

Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater

Emily Anderson

There was once a boy named Peter. Peter had an older sister, Katherine, who worked day after day in her garden.

She grew many things in her grand garden, overflowing with growth and happiness. Fruits for sweet refreshing treats and drinks, vegetables for hearty meals, flowers for decoration, and all sorts of herbs for medicine. Peter didn't have much interest in the garden, preferring to play with his toys instead. Sometimes, at the end of the season, he would receive corn husk dolls which he looked forward to each year and cherished greatly.

Every day, Katherine would come through the back door with a basket filled with garden goodies and Peter would marvel at all the different shapes and colors of everything. The various sizes of the tomatoes and strawberries, the color of the corn, and the shapes of the zucchini. Though he had no interest in helping in the garden, he was still impressed and proud of his sister's hard work and the outcomes.

~August~

On a warm August evening, Katherine came through the back door with a grand pumpkin. It was placed on the counter with a thud, shaking the dishes. Katherine was very proud of her hard work while Peter awed over the gourd. It had to have been the biggest pumpkin he had ever seen! And it came from his backyard! He couldn't believe it!

The pumpkin sat on the counter like a trophy, proudly standing tall and beaming at the attention and admiration it got. Peter would use it as a prop for his play, it being incorporated into his stories. Though after a day of gazing at the orange beauty, Katherine, with help from Peter, cut it up and made pumpkin stew.

Katherine, being the eldest, carved and gutted it, placing the goopy insides in a bowl. Peter's job was to go through the slippery clumps and remove the seeds, which would be seasoned and baked.

When Katherine was finishing cutting the remains of the pumpkin, Peter asked, "Why must we bake the seeds?"

"To eat them," Katherine answered.

Peter looked at the bowl of washed seeds, ready to be coated and put into the oven.

"Must we bake them? I don't think I would like to be baked very much."

"If we do not bake them, then they would have to be planted. But we

can not plant them for we have no more room, so we must bake them. Pumpkins take up a lot of room. Their vines twist and turn all over the place," his sister explained.

Peter reluctantly obliged but waited until her back was turned and snuck a few seeds into his pocket.

After a delicious dinner and a warm bath, Katherine tucked her brother into bed tight and gave him a kiss goodnight. As still as a rock, Peter kept quiet as he listened for her footfalls, then the closing of her door. He threw off his covers and ran to his clothes pile, digging around for his pants and the pumpkin seeds within the pocket. Once he found them, he held one up to his eyes inspecting it.

"You're not much different than the baked ones," he told it, turning it round and round, "just softer and a different color. I don't know why we can't eat you this way."

Then, looking left and right to make sure no one was watching him, he ate the seed. It didn't taste the greatest. It wasn't crunchy and flavorful like the others, it was softer, but he ate it regardless.

"Maybe that's why we mustn't eat them raw," Peter mused, climbing back into bed, "because they don't taste too good."

The next day came and went. As did the day after and the day after that. It wasn't until almost a week had passed did Peter start feeling off.

"My belly feels funny," he told Katherine.

She felt his forehead with the front and back of her hand then gave him some tea to soothe his stomach, not feeling any signs of a fever.

For the next few days he would continue to complain and she would repeat feeling his forehead and giving him more tea.

"Perhaps you caught a bug," she said after a week.

"But I am not ill besides my tummy hurting," he kept saying.

~September~

A month came and went, but the strange ache in the boy's belly continued, only it started to rise. There was a tickle inside him, just by his ribs. He would continue to complain and get more tea.

"It feels like I have a snake trying to slither out of me," Peter described.

"Did you eat a snake?" Katherine asked.

"I do not believe so."

"Then I would assume it is not a snake. Here, have some more tea. Maybe you should try to go to the bathroom."

But no matter how much tea he drank and time he spent in the bathroom, the strange sensation continued.

~October~

Then, he felt it in his throat. It felt like there was something stuck. Something that wouldn't go down.

"You must have a hair stuck," Katherine tried to diagnose, "keep trying to swallow so it will go down."

But no matter how much he drank and swallowed, the irritating itch won't go away. Peter would try to cough it up, maybe if he spit it out the scratch would stop, but it didn't.

During that month, Katherine found Peter having bouts of coughing fits as he tried to hack and hawk the haunting feeling out of him. He would end up making himself sick. So not knowing what else to do, Katherine called for the doctor. But the doctor found nothing wrong with the boy.

"Just make sure to eat light and to drink plenty of liquids," he said, "I believe you may have a persistent bug."

~November~

One morning when he woke up, Peter noticed something in the corner of his mouth. Assuming it was a crumb, he wiped at it.

But it stayed.

Putting his fingers around it, he gave it a yank and immediately cried out in pain. Deep within his stomach he felt a piercing pulling sensation that felt like his stomach was going to come out of him.

Hearing her brother cry out, Katherine came running in to see the little boy gasping and gagging in bed. She rushed over to him and collected him into her arms. "Peter! What is the matter?!"

He opened his mouth and pointed to the thing sticking out of him through tears. Katherine tried to grab it, but Peter shouted, "Don't touch it! You will hurt me!"

She recoiled at the shout of her brother but didn't want to cause him more pain, so she held him as he sobbed in her arms.

~December~

As the days became colder and colder and the garden officially retired for the spring, the thing grew into a long, loopy, curly vine. It was as green as can be and had small leaves blooming. It looked like something Katherine had seen before, but she couldn't place a finger on what. And no matter what they did, cutting it, trying to pull it, it always came back.

Daily life became a challenge for the little boy. Whenever he would run around, the vine would catch on something making him lurch. He wasn't able

to play much because his toys would sometimes fall on the vine, which brought more pain. It grew and grew, and there was nothing that could be done to stop it. He stopped accompanying his sister to the store as the vine would pull and snag causing him great pain and sickness. Eventually, it grew so long that it was as if he were wearing a wedding veil. The vines twisted and turned together, weaving themselves as they trailed behind Peter.

Katherine became something of a nursemaid to him, already doing the duties of cooking and cleaning, but she always had some kind of help from Peter. Now, though, everything relied on her to take care of the home and her brother.

She tried to come up with ideas to help with the weight of the vine, such as putting it in a basket and carrying it around, but there was only so much that could be done.

So it continued to grow.

The doctor was called once more but he was properly perplexed by the long looming limb and had to gracefully bow out and give his condolences.

~March~

After an agonizingly slow winter filled with false hope, the vine didn't stop its growth. There were a few times when a leaf or two would brown and fall off, but once spring sprung, so did the vine.

After a careful and in-depth inspection of Peter and the vine, Katherine noticed a bud. And as it seemed that the bud grew stronger, Peter grew weaker.

No longer could he run around outside, play with his favorite toys, or eat his favorite foods. He could only lay in bed while his sister tended to him. He was even presented with some corn husk dolls for his eighth birthday, tiny outfits wrapped around them, but they didn't spark any joy. They sat on his nightstand instead, watching over him as he slowly became bound to his bed.

~April~

One day during spring cleaning, Katherine was going through Peter's closet when she stilled. Her eyes widened in horror and a gasp went through her.

She found the pumpkin seeds.

With shaky hands she collected them into her hands and turned around to the pitiful boy in his bed.

"Peter..."

He raised his head in acknowledgment as talking grew too painful.

She slowly walked over to his side and showed him the seeds.

A look of terror and guilt crossed his face when he realized she had

found his swiped seeds from months ago. He forgot he didn't get rid of them.

"...You ate one," she said rather than asked.

Peter nodded.

No words were spoken as the boy looked at the seeds in his sister's hand and the vine draped across the floor. It took a few moments, but once the boy made the connection, he began to cry.

"Am-am I going to die?" He shuttered out, the motions moving the vine within him, which caused harder cries.

Katherine's eyes started to leak as her heart clenched, seeing her baby brother in so much pain. "I-I do not know. I-"

"I only ate one!" The boy cried out.

"I do not think that matters."

He mustered up the strength and flung himself onto his sister. She fell back onto the floor but held him regardless. They cried and cooed with each other and Katherine dreaded the idea of letting him go.

~May~

One night, months after Peter ate the pumpkin seed, he grew very, very weak, just barely being able to keep his eyes open. He was officially restricted to his bed as playing was of no more interest to the boy as it became difficult for him to move around. Katherine held him the whole night reading him stories, gently singing to him, and rocking him.

But it didn't matter. The flower bloomed, and with it, Peter faded away.

Katherine continued to hold him until the sun rose, not wanting to let go in case he would come back, that maybe he was just deep in sleep. But he never did.

When the roosters roused, she picked her brother up and carried him with her into the garden.

As she walked, the trail of vines and leaves followed behind her, taunting. 'We took Peter from you, and he's not coming back. He was a great host, we got lots of nutrients. Thank you for taking care of him so we could grow.'

Katherine had great resentment towards the pumpkin vines, but they were one with her brother, and she loved them as well.

As she neared to the back of her garden, a wide empty space of dirt, she knelt on the damp earth and dug with her hands, slowly, until there was a Peter-sized hole.

Her hold on him was like iron as she sobbed into his hair and prayed he would rest well. His hair caught her tears and she imagined that they would go to live with him in the earth.

Slowly and gently, Katherine laid Peter down into the ground as if she were putting him to bed. She placed his hands over his stomach and brushed the hair out of his eyes.

The sun shined beautifully, a complete opposite of how Katherine felt. 'How dare the world be happy while I am not!' She thought.

"Oh Peter," she cried, "my sweet, sweet Peter. May you now rest in peace."

And just as slowly as she dug his grave, it took her longer to fill it, not wanting to face that her brother was truly gone, that such a careless mistake took him from her. She looked away as the last of the dirt covered his face, the final goodbye.

Over time, Katherine couldn't bring herself to that area of her garden. She hoped that the vine that took her brother from her would bring him back if she let it wither. But through her neglect, it grew larger, and Peter never returned.

More flowers bloomed and more vines busted through the soil. Peter's resting place became a pumpkin patch, the surrounding area covered in curled and coiled vines and yellow flowers.

She watched and waited as all the flowers but one lost their petals and drooped. The last flower, however, shed her petals and a round nub took her place. And she watched as that nub grew bigger, and bigger, and oranger, and oranger, until a great pumpkin sat atop the soil.

Unlike everything else in her garden, the pumpkin was not harvested. Katherine couldn't bring herself to that part of her garden and the thought of cutting the pumpkin off the vine, off of Peter, was too much. She didn't want to hurt him.

So it was left alone.

But soon it drew the attention of the insects, its withering and saggy state delicious to them. Then the birds came, pecking and pulling until the pumpkin tore apart. The squirrels and critters came last to collect the scraps, leaving only a pile of seeds where the pumpkin once was.

Katherine never grew or ate pumpkin again, but it didn't stop the vine from producing one single perfect pumpkin every year, only to be left to wither away and decay.

The Deer and the Deity

Daquinua Craig

There was a rumor going around the wood of a magical grotto hidden deep in the forest. If someone were to step inside it, they would meet a mystic deity that would grant them one wish. A group of fawns stood in a grove, sharing how they planned to find it and what they would wish for.

One fawn, Griffin, claimed that he would be the first to find it. There, he would wish for his antlers to grow as big as his father's, who was the head of the herd. His own had already begun to emerge from his head. They were among the biggest in the group, besides his twin brother Gideon, who gave him a bitter look. The two assumed fighting stances as if preparing to engage in combat. The other fawns rolled their eyes and continued the group conversation without them.

Phoenix listened in from afar, pretending to inspect the fruit hanging from the trees. Tiny red apples began to show themselves among the leaves. It was spring, and the flora around them had just begun to sprout and bloom. Although she always loved passing time by observing the beauty of the natural world, there was often something else lingering in the back of her mind. She had noted how the trees lost their leaves in the fall, and how they were back again here in the spring, new and vibrant and lovely as ever. She also noticed how, similarly, the bucks in the herd would shed their antlers, much like the trees with their leaves. Occasionally, she wished that she was a tree. It was easier than wishing she were a buck.

At 14 months old, she had already lost all of her spots, but that was all she got when it came to growing older. Phoenix found herself envious of the adolescent bucks in the herd that had begun to sprout antlers and challenge each other in tests of strength. She especially admired the older bucks and their short heads, strong, thick bodies, and cool demeanors.

The crowd of fawns dispersed and they all went their separate ways. Griffin and Gideon were left behind, still grappling with each other. Panicked, Phoenix ran to the nearest bush to hide. Being left behind with the two of them was never a good experience.

Once, Phoenix had attempted to put two tree branches together and put them on her head. She thought that wearing them might help her feel more confident, even though they weren't real antlers. The twins had walked by, and upon spotting her, started to guffaw. Gideon had approached Phoenix wearing an evil grin. He scoffed at her, asking what she planned to do with those sticks on her head. Griffin chuckled from a distance, nearly doubling over with laughter.

Phoenix backed away nervously, claiming that they had fallen onto her from the tree above. With a swift turn of his head, Gideon had used his antlers to send the branches flying off. Phoenix flinched and shrieked in fear. She fell to the ground with tears in her eyes as she inched closer to the tree behind her.

Griffin had approached shortly after, and the two brothers stood on either side of Phoenix. Griffin tauntingly waved his antlers in front of Phoenix's face, asking if she could see them. When Phoenix hadn't responded, Griffin moved them dangerously close to her nose. Phoenix nodded fearfully, and Gideon snickered, amused.

Just then, Kallie—another young doe—pranced by the three of them. The twins were suddenly disinterested by Phoenix, and Gideon had run to catch up with his new attraction. Before following, Griffin swiped his antlers across Phoenix's face once more, this time grazing her nose with one of the spikes. Phoenix yelped, and Griffin jumped back in surprise as a line of blood appeared on Phoenix's nose. In a panic, Griffin ran away to reach Kallie and Gideon.

Hidden in the bush, Phoenix felt a phantom sting from the scar on her nose. History repeated itself once more, and Kallie pranced by the two brothers. They immediately paused their roughhousing to catch up with the doe. Phoenix rolled her eyes, not surprised by their unchanging attention spans, but she also felt a slight pang of disappointment. She wished that she could be a normal doe like Kallie, with nothing to do but be followed around and be admired by the young bucks in the herd. The thought ruminated for a while before Phoenix could snap out of it and return to her task.

Phoenix looked both ways before stepping out of the bush where she was hiding. After she was sure that the two bucks were long gone, she breathed a sigh of relief. She shook a few stray leaves from her cranberry fur before trotting down the path toward the river.

It was nightfall by the time she reached the grotto. Fireflies twinkled and drifted through the cool spring air, lighting up the entrance in a magical fashion. One firefly in particular seemed to be blinking just for her, as if encouraging her to follow. Wearily, Phoenix approached the bug and entered the cave.

Upon seeing her enter, thousands of other fireflies lit up in excitement, illuminating the entirety of the cave. It wasn't very large, but it was deep enough to house a single chair at the furthest end. The chair was engulfed in daisies, so much so that it was impossible to determine the material underneath. Several vines hung from the ceiling and were spread about the cave. Several fireflies swirled around them as if playing a game of tag. Phoenix felt a strong sense of belonging—an emotion that she very rarely felt around her own kind. Enchanted, she stepped further into the grotto.

A beautiful fox emerged from behind the daisy throne. She donned a long, flowing pink dress that complimented her peach-colored fur and dragged behind her as she walked. Her tail followed elegantly after her. A matching pink azalea flower sat clipped to her left ear, and her hands were clasped gracefully at her heart. Phoenix was shocked to see the animal walking on her hind legs. The fox's uncanny demeanor made her cower down in fear.

The fox smiled gently and stopped in front of her seat.

"Do not fret, my child. There is no reason to be uneasy."

Phoenix rose carefully as the fox motioned for her to approach. She proceeded slowly, feeling the need to take her time in the presence of such a mysterious yet graceful creature. The fox smiled warmly all the way, patiently waiting for Phoenix to gather her strength.

When Phoenix stopped just a few inches away from her, the fox stooped down to hold her face in her hands.

"My name is Nova. It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Phoenix." With each word, the comforting scent of cherry blossoms escaped from her mouth. Phoenix found the sight and smells of all the flora to be reassuring. She no longer worried about how the fox perceived her, and she didn't think twice to ask how she already knew her name.

Sensing her calmness, Nova took the opportunity to continue.

"Why have you come here, little one?"

Phoenix used her newfound courage to speak her wish to the fox.

"I don't know, exactly," she said, half-lying," but I do know that I want to be much braver. I want to be bigger and stronger than I am. I want to be able to prove my worth to the other deer in the herd." She found that her voice was louder and more powerful than when she typically spoke. Surprised, she hesitated for a bit before adding on.

"Most importantly, I want to be understood."

"Is that really all you wish for," Nova asked softly, "or is there something more that your heart desires?"

Embarrassed, Phoenix glanced around the cave. A few of the fireflies were still playing, but most of them hovered in place and blinked as if waiting for her response.

Wearily, Phoenix replied: "I'm jealous of the bucks in my herd. I wish I was more like them."

Nova smiled sweetly, with a softness in her eyes that Phoenix had only ever seen in her mother's.

"My dear," she said, "you are already as brave and as strong as you wish to be. Just by coming here, you have proved to be more courageous than any of the other deer in your herd."

Delicately, Nova planted a comforting kiss on the space between Phoenix's ears. She gently let go of Phoenix's face and returned her hands to be clasped at her heart. She then rose, once again towering over the small deer.

"Even though you are already half of what you aspire to be, I can still grant the other portion of your wish. Come dawn, you shall be born again."

Although confused, Phoenix felt the need to bow at Nova's generosity. This was met by a chuckle and a slight lift of Phoenix's chin.

"There's no need for that, sweet little. It is I who should be bowing down to you." Gracefully, Nova lifted her dress from her feet in a curtsy.

The fireflies danced as if in celebration. Some swirled around Phoenix while others hovered above her head in the shape of two antlers. They then dispersed into the air to resume their games.

"You are welcome to come back any time, little one," Nova said gingerly, "but for now, I suggest you return home before your parents begin to worry."

Phoenix nodded, turning to exit the cave. Before leaving, she turned to look behind her, and was met with Nova waving a gentle goodbye. The fox seemed to be anticipating that they would meet again soon. Grinning, Phoenix exited the cave and returned to the night.

Stepping into the cool night air, Phoenix felt a calmness that was new and reassuring. Seeing that it was dark, a few fireflies offered to follow Phoenix on her journey back home. With her path illuminated by the friendly glowing bugs, she trotted back across the river and past the grove.

When Phoenix awoke the following morning, she felt a new heaviness from the top of her head. With her parents still asleep, she groggily made her way over to the pond that sat beside her bed of grass. Looking at her reflection, she took notice of two small bumps in between her ears.

The House She Once Knew

Daquinua Craig

Typically, once something is dead, it stays that way. Or at least that's what I've been told.

"It's dead, Tracy. It can't hurt you."

My father gave me a stern look as I watched the dead rat wearily as if it would jump up with a sudden burst of life and a need for vengeance. In his left hand, he held the weapon of the rat's demise—an old blunt shovel, used over many years (mainly by my mother, when tending to her precious garden). Most of the rat's blood was on the floor of the garage with it, but some of it dripped from the shovel; the shiny red fluid reflected the hot summer sun shining through the windows of the garage, and each dot hit the ground with a soft tap.

I had been too afraid to do it myself. My father often thought of me as weak. His harsh criticism of my character was usually mirrored by my three older brothers; they would mock me with tests of strength and ability. Most of all, they would taunt me with the small dead creatures they'd bring inside from the garage or from behind the barn.

My mother was not the same as the others. She would never speak up for me—but every night, in the privacy of my bedroom, sitting on my twin size bed, she would brush my hair and sing to me sweetly. Her kind words and soft voice would negate all of the cruelty I'd faced from my brothers and father that day. To this day, I can't tell if she genuinely cared for me or if she pitied me more. Nevertheless, she offered me a bit of solace throughout my adverse childhood.

That was, until she passed away when I was 14.

I had frequent dreams about my mother that year. It was the same one each time—my mother would rise from the grave we buried her in, just outside the farm, and come looking for me. She would shuffle towards me at an agonizingly slow pace. As she approached, the fence surrounding our house would turn from the freshly painted eggshell white to a dead, decaying yellow color, almost the color of bile. I would always wake up before she passed it. She would reach to touch the door of the gate, and my eyes would open as if on cue.

Around my 16th birthday, the nightmares stopped. Coincidentally, one by one, my brothers began to move out of the house. My oldest brother, Lucas, was enlisted in the army; my second oldest brother, Noah, flew off to school to study animals; and the youngest of my older brothers, Colin, ran off with his high-school girlfriend, "in pursuit of a better life," he'd claimed. This left me alone with my father, who began to act indifferent towards me as soon as his last son had ventured off.

At age 59, my father would do the basics: work to keep the bills paid and food on the table. We rarely spoke to each other for two long years. We didn't really have anything to talk about aside from when I anticipated leaving home. If I was stupid or naive, I would assume it was because he was going to miss me. But I wasn't, and I knew my father enough to know that the thought of me leaving was probably the only thought he'd had regarding me since I learned to walk.

Instead of ridiculing and belittling me as he had done in the past, my father would often walk by me without a single glance. Part of me wondered if he had put me down to seem tougher in front of my brothers, or maybe to make an example out of me. Either way, his deprecating attitude toward me seemed to vanish almost immediately after Colin left.

At age 18, I decided to pursue a career in astronomy. Ever since I was a child, I enjoyed studying the night sky and the plethora of stars it beheld. Living in the country had its perks—less light pollution meant more visibility, and almost every night, I would go out with my constellation map to track the glowing masses of gas, the lines they formed, and the creatures they created.

Shortly before I was meant to graduate high school, I got a college pamphlet in the mail inviting me to join the school in studying the stars. Overjoyed, I applied immediately without even glancing at the other brochures I had received. With no one to monitor my decisions and make sure I was going to get the most out of my college experience, I went into university blindly.

My father, of course, wouldn't have cared either way. He seemed almost grateful to lend me the money for the application when I asked. He wasn't a religious man, but I know he prayed that I would get accepted so he'd have one less pest in the house. I'm sure he would much rather have had rats from the garage as roommates than to have to see me every time he came home from work.

Around March of the following year, I got a letter from the college congratulating me on my acceptance. With no one to celebrate with, I kicked my feet in a silent victory. I paced around my room with countless possibilities swarming through my head. All day, I would have nothing to do but gaze up at the stars. I would finally be able to make friends. I might even finally find someone to love.

That summer, on the night before I was supposed to leave for the airport, I decided to climb on top of the barn and look up into the sky for one last time. It was the last time I'd see the sky from that point of view. Whispering to myself, I looked at each star and wished it goodbye.

At some point that night, my eyes grew heavy and I fell asleep atop the roof of the barn.

In the distance, my mother's disfigured hands began to claw at the dirt in which she was bound. Dirty, grimy, and gray, her arms made their way through the dirt, then the rest of her body as she dragged herself out of the grave.

Slowly, she rose to her bare and mangled feet. Her toes twisted and curled in obscure ways, set by rigor mortis long ago. Like a newborn calf, she clumsily made her way toward the familiar white fence of the house she once knew.

Her eyes were long gone, feasted upon by bugs still housed inside the sockets. Each bovine step disturbed them, and a few would fall out from the holes.

Soft but ragged breathing escaped her lips—or what remained of them. Although quite a few were missing, her remaining teeth could be seen where her upper lip was meant to be. Her bottom lip, half eaten by the same bugs housed in her skull, was blackened and moldy.

As she reached for the fence, the now old and chipped eggshell-white paint once again became an ugly bile yellow. This time, however, her hand made contact with the door, and with a loud creak it opened, giving way to the path before the house.

My mother glanced around at what used to be her beautiful garden, now filled with weeds and overgrown grass without a flower in sight. Whether this angered her or not, I will never know. Whatever the case, she began to shuffle a little faster. Now, at almost a walking pace, she approached the door of the house.

As she reached for the doorknob, the red paint of the door faded away to the same bile yellow of the fence behind her. She turned the knob, and as she stepped inside, the dead yellow color swept across the entirety of the house. Both inside and out, the once vibrant paint colors were now the color of death.

Once in the house, she went straight for the kitchen table. Her garden shovel, unmoved since her death, was taken into her slim, bony right hand, and she turned to make her way to her former bedroom.

There, my father slept, lying on his back with his hands folded neatly on his chest. Door ajar, without a word, my mother only stood and stared at him for a while.

She approached him so slowly that he could have easily gotten up and run away from her. Cursed with deep sleep, my father continued snoring as my dead mother lifted her garden shovel and drove it into his stomach. His eyes nearly popped out of his head on impact. In shock, he couldn't even scream. He managed a few confused gasps, but he could only stare at the dark in fear, with wide eyes and shaking hands. My mother lifted the shovel once more, allowing

my father a few more pained gurgles before spearing into his throat, then his left eye, then his stomach again. She repeated this until her husband ceased his groaning and his shaking.

She lifted the shovel for the last time, letting my father's blood drip from it. Each drop hit the hardwood floor of the bedroom with a soft tap. She laid the stained shovel on top of his unmoving chest before turning to exit.

She crossed the hall to my bedroom, standing there a while before reaching up to touch the sign of my name she had taped to the door when I was born. "Tracy," in big pink font. Her stale fingers drifted carefully over each letter, as if in remembrance—or maybe remorse. She then knocked twice before twisting the doorknob. Upon opening the door and noticing I wasn't there, she turned around to look for me.

It was then that my eyes finally opened.

Frantically, I jumped up from my resting place on the top of the barn. Peeking over the edge of the roof, I caught sight of the gate surrounding the house.

It was yellow, and it was open.

I adjusted myself to get a view of the front door. From it, my mother emerged, immediately turning to face me as if she had known I'd be there.

I could do nothing but stare into the holes of her empty eye sockets.

But then she grunted and waved.

I expected her to try to climb to the roof of the barn, where she would strangle me, push me off, or eat me whole. But she only grunted again and continued waving. What was left of her bottom lip moved downward in an almost-smile.

I couldn't manage a smile, but I lifted up a hand to wave back.

She lowered her own mangled hand and stared at me for quite a while. I often wish so badly to ask her what she was thinking at that moment. I wonder to myself—could she have spoken? What would she have said? But lost in thought, she only stood and stared. At one point, she seemed to sigh. Her shoulders trembled slightly as if she was crying. She lifted her hand again to reach out to me but hesitated, drawing her hand back to her side. She turned her back to me, looked out beyond the field to where her grave was, and left.

A sudden cool breeze swept over the farm as my mother returned to her other home. I didn't know for sure that she was going back to her grave, but she walked in that direction, and I watched her all the way until she disappeared over the hill. It wasn't until then that I started shaking—partly from the breeze, but mostly at the thought of her leaving me again. The shakes became heaves and sobs as I curled into a ball on the roof of the barn and fell asleep.

When I woke up, it was daybreak. The sky was a sweet coral pink, and

birds began to chirp softly in the distance. Sniffling, I made my way off the roof, using hay bales stacked beside the barn for support. The fence was back to its familiar eggshell white, and the gate was closed. The smell of bacon and eggs drifted from the windows of the house.

When I entered the kitchen, my father turned from the stove to look at me with gentle, tear-filled eyes.

"I dreamt about your mother last night, ya know."

I only stood and stared.

"She was yelling. She really told me off. Then she slapped me. Got me real good."

I kept staring. He sniffled and rubbed the back of his neck before speaking again.

"I'm sorry, kid."

Slowly, he opened his arms to offer a hug. I went to him, of course.

Typically, once something is dead, it stays that way. Or at least that's what I've believed. But that morning, in the center of the kitchen, our house was living and breathing again.

Battle Scars

Molly Roth

The Reaper's job was never easy.

Two spirits hovered before him, surrounded by void. White stars shone through the darkness like pinpricks to a world that only one of them could return to.

A second chance.

Another beginning.

"You do not have much time," the Reaper said, tired but stern. "The balance of life and death must be maintained. The prayers of your loved ones are enough for one of your souls to return to your ruined body. But only one."

He leaned against his scythe like a cane. "If you are quick, you may choose which one of you lives."

Without a second's delay, their voices came to life.

"I had a future," the taller of the spirits said, immediately turning toward the female spirit, his form translucent and colorless.

"But you didn't have a life," she shot back. It was as though the Reaper were invisible to them.

But he continued watching. Listening.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean." Her voice was a wavering, high-pitched note. "You spent your entire life in that room, studying for university, and then once you got there, you spent your entire time studying more! And now you'll go back and waste your life away working at some IT company—"

"Do you think you know me?" The male spirit raised his voice. "What, when you were going out every night with your friends, not even bothering to call when you were going to be late for dinner? How do you think that made Mom feel, huh?"

"Oh, who gives a damn about what Mom thinks?" she said. "I at least know how to have a little fun. Have you even enjoyed a good horror movie in your life, or have you been too busy studying for that?"

"How about what I feel? Those nights, I was worried you might be dead in a ditch—"

A quick response, loud and vindictive, "Well, now we're both dead, so it doesn't matter."

A brief lull. Spirits do not need to catch their breath, but perhaps these two were new enough to death that they did not realize yet. If they had proper faces, the Reaper was sure that they would glare at each other.

As it was, their forms only flickered back and forth furiously, like the pandemonium of colors in TV static.

The female spoke first.

"If I'm dead, think of everyone I'm leaving behind," she said. "I have a boyfriend."

A scoff. "The boyfriend card, really, Stella? I know for a fact you hate him."

"You're the one who hates him!" Defensive. "He just… gets into moods."

"When my boyfriend gets into moods, he sulks all day. He doesn't—"

"You have a boyfriend?" Stella asked, surprised. "Since when?"

"Since three months ago." The voice was surprised. Injured. "How do you not know that?"

"Am I responsible for keeping track of all of your movements while you're at school?"

"I'd think you'd at least know when I had a boyfriend."

Defensiveness turned into sarcasm. "Well, I'm sorry that I'm not the perfect sibling, unlike the esteemed Leo Davis. Sorry that I can't have the perfect grades, the full ride scholarship, and the perfect fucking boyfriend. I'll try harder to butt into your personal business and give you unsolicited advice about how he's treating you."

"It's not unsolicited when it's a matter of safety."

"This is the exact same shit that got us into this mess," Stella snapped. "Maybe, if you had been paying more attention to the road, none of this would have happened!"

"I was paying attention to the road," Leo said. "That car crashed into us."

"I just took Drivers Ed, haven't you heard about defensive driving?"

"I just took Title IX safety training, haven't you heard about abuse?"

A standstill. The Reaper chose not to point out that they were wasting precious time arguing about something that ultimately had little impact on which one of them would be sent back to their comatose bodies.

"Look, he's not…" Stella sighed. An unnecessary gesture, considering she had no lungs. "Whatever. It doesn't matter anymore."

The two spirits did not speak for a long moment, letting the silence sit between them like an unbreachable wall. The stars in the void twinkled in and out like the hand on a clock ticking relentlessly.

The Reaper wondered if they would remain silent for their remaining time.

But the brother finally spoke.

"You can go," Leo said.

This pause reeked of confusion. When Stella spoke, her words were confused and halting.

"What… do you mean?"

"You're younger than me," Leo said. "You should be able to keep living. See more things. Go to college. Have fun."

"What?" Stella asked. "But that's… you're the one with the future career! And the boyfriend, apparently. Is he nice? I bet he's really nice. I bet he treats you to cake on your birthday and doesn't ignore you when he's mad."

"We haven't gotten to my birthday yet… well, I guess we never will."

"No, you're not listening!" Stella's voice cracked. "If anyone deserves to go back, it's you! Mom would much rather have you than me!"

"This isn't about what Mom thinks."

"But it is," Stella whispered. Her form became as still as untouched water. "If I go back, she'll hate me. She didn't bother to tell me that my boyfriend is… was… not nice. She doesn't care. She only cares about you."

"Stella…"

"But that's okay!" Stella's voice wavered. "I gave up on impressing her a long time ago. And all of my friends… they'll be fine. You should go."

"That's…" Leo was at a loss for words. "You can't expect me to leave you after saying that! Stella… my run was pretty good. I had friends, and a good partner, and some good times at college…"

"You're really making me feel better about myself."

"But you haven't had any of that," Leo continued. "You should… you should have a chance at a better life. Just promise me you'll break up with that asshole. You could give that girl a chance instead. What's her name again? The one who you said was really pretty? You ate ice cream topped with cream cheese together?"

"One, it was feta cheese. And two, that was back in middle school."

"Well, a different person then. Or not. Doesn't really matter as long as you're happy."

Stella's voice cracked, high-pitched and grieving. "How will I be happy in a world without you?"

Leo's spirit hovered closer to Stella's. Would he hug her, if he had the arms to do so?

"Children," the Reaper said, lifting one bony hand from his scythe.

"I'm sorry, but your time is up."

"But… we haven't decided," Stella said.

These decisions always fell to him, in the end. It was an impossible choice, to choose between two lives, both just as vibrant as the other. To choose which would rest in the peaceful embrace of death and which would continue

the often fruitless struggle of life.

But it was his responsibility, nonetheless.

"I'm afraid I have."

Two children play at a nearby park, laughing. The older of the two pushes his four-year-old sister on the swing, and she squeals every time she reaches the height of the arch. She flies downwards with a delighted scream.

"Higher!" she shouts, determined to touch the clouds.

The older brother laughs and pushes her harder. "Hold on tight!" he calls after her soaring form.

The little girl ignores him, wrapping her left arm tightly around one chain and letting go with her right. Her brother shouts in reprimand, but she is already reaching forward, determined to grab hold of the cloud shaped like a mermaid.

She leans too far forward. Instead of touching soft, cotton-filled clouds, she lets out a scream and falls into the mulch. Small pieces of wood lodge into her hair and fill her mouth, and she lies very still in shock.

"Stella!"

The little girl starts crying as her brother helps her up. She cries as her brother lets her climb onto his back, and he carries her all the way home. She cries as her mother cleans her scraped arms and legs and applies smiley-face Band-Aids to them. She even cries as her mother thanks her brother for his help.

"Aw, Stella, don't cry," her brother says.

The little girl's breath hitches. "B-but I'm dying!"

Her brother shakes his head, wearing a knowing smile on his face. "You're not dying, silly."

The little girl frowns. She stares at her brother doubtfully. "But… there's blood."

"That doesn't mean you're dying," her brother says. "That just means you have battle scars, like cool heroes! See? I have one too!"

The brother rolls up his sleeve to reveal a small red scar on his forearm, lumpy and uneven.

The little girl sniffs. Her tears recede. "Gross," she says, almost reverently. "Where's it from?"

"I cut it on a branch while climbing a tree."

"So not in a fight with bad guys?"

"Oh, there was a bad guy, alright." The brother nods. "The tree. I conquered it the next day by climbing it all the way to the top!"

"Was it scary?"

The big brother is a child who knows that boys should not be scared of anything, which is perhaps why he says, "Why would it be scary?"

"Because the tree hurt you, silly!"

"Well, maybe I was a little nervous," the big brother admits. "But I had to conquer it somehow! So I pushed the fear aside and conquered it!"

The little sister has forgotten her tears entirely. "I want to fight the swings too!" she declares. "Can we go back tomorrow?"

The brother grins. "You got it!"

Ten years later, a brother and sister lie in separate hospital beds, fighting for their lives. Even their heart monitors sound as though they are struggling, beeping slowly and sporadically.

Only one of them will open their eyes.

But she will be ready to conquer the world.

NONFICTION

The Angels are Coming

Emily Anderson

I was in first grade when I had my first sleepover. It was the evening of December 23rd, 2009, and Aimée came to my house after weeks of planning. We were so excited but didn't anticipate how the night would end.

Pickles, my mom's cat, had not been acting right for the past few weeks. He wasn't eating or drinking or going to the box often. That night, it continued. So she took him to the vet where they told her it was his time to go. That he'd gone septic and only had a few more hours left. So mamma called my dad to bring me to the vet. She thought I was old enough to say goodbye.

I was told that the angels were coming to get him sooner than we thought. I was confused because I was pulled from such fun at home and didn't really understand why the angels were taking Pickles, but I was upset seeing mamma so upset.

I sat outside the room with my dad while mamma and Pickles were inside with the vet. I could hear mamma crying as she was saying the final goodbye to her sweet boy.

I was looking at the toys in the corner, wondering if I was allowed to play with them, when this bright light caught my eye. The door in front of me began to glow. Light was shining through the gaps of the door, a beautiful white-yellow glow that was accompanied by angelic hums like what I would hear at church. I could hear mamma crying, and as her sniffles and sobs got louder, the light became brighter and the singing rose until it reached its peak. The singing ended abruptly but the light slowly receded until it was just the fluorescent light shining under the door. Mamma told me she heard my little voice say, "He's gone now, the angels took him."

After, the three of us sat in the car in the parking lot for a while, while mamma mourned for her boy, and I just looked up at the night sky trying to find the angel that was carrying Pickles amongst the stars up to heaven, but I couldn't.

Purple Pretty

Emily Anderson

When I was little, my preschool held a summer fair festival event. One of the events was a raffle, and if your name was chosen, you became the proud owner of a betta fish or a hermit crab.

When the raffle began, my mom had a sinking feeling that my name would be chosen. The hermit crab winner's name was pulled and my mom was dreading the name chosen for the fish.

"And the mommy of this fish is…" the lady started.

My mom was pleading to all the gods that my name would not be chosen.

"Emily Anderson!"

Opposite of my mother, I was so excited that I won! The lady in charge of pulling the kids' names, my mom swore was out to get her. That she didn't even pull my name but read it aloud just to irritate her. So I went home with a purple fish and named her Purple Pretty.

She had a nice round tank on my dresser with blue colored marbles on the bottom and an Ariel statue from the movie "The Little Mermaid." I was a very proud fish owner.

One day, my mom took me and my sisters up to Pittsburgh to visit family when she got a frantic call from my dad.

"Purple Pretty is dead!"

We were on our way home at that point and it was a rush to figure out what to do. They decided to replace her so I wouldn't have to experience my first pet death so young. The problem? My dad is colorblind. He can't tell the difference between blue, purple, and green. So he put Purple Pretty in a bag, drove to PetCo, walked up to the first employee he saw, held out the bag, and said, "I need a fish that looks exactly like this!"

When we got home, the first thing I did was run upstairs to my room and see Purple Pretty. But something wasn't right. Purple Pretty was blue. I looked at my dad and asked why she was blue. This motherfucker said, "Sometimes, fish change colors."

I thought it was very suspicious, but didn't really think much about it because why would he lie to me?

I was told what happened later when I was in middle school and thought it was absolutely hysterical. My dad isn't a good dad, but he really tried his best with that one.

Twenty Dollars

Emily Anderson

There was one day when I was young that I was mad at my little sisters. So I took their favorite dolls, Liana and Alexa, the two girls from "Barbie & the Diamond Castle," and hid them behind the dollhouse in my room.

As you can imagine, chaos ensued. Oh, did they scream and cry, tearing the playroom apart trying to find their dolls. But of course, they never found them.

Mamma was starting to get desperate as my sisters became more and more hysterical and upped the stakes. "Whoever finds the dolls gets $20."

So naturally, I ran to my room and pulled the dolls out from their hiding spot and presented them to mamma with a big ol' smile on my little face.

I didn't get the $20.

Home Keeps Running Away From Me

Katja Haarstick

I'm trapped in thought, standing in an empty meadow when my A/C turns on. I swivel my head toward the breeze and face the blank space of the wall across from me. No longer am I surrounded by the soft grass of a meadow wonderland, the sky a twilight blue, long lost "homes" dotting the sky, a dappling of white gas that reminds me that experience is fleeting. I had thought about the future again, that dreamy crescendo providing the hope that one day I would find my place. These thoughts are my proof, my weakness, that Home is not something I can easily grasp. Just when I take its hand, it slips away from my palms and disappears into things like the artificial breeze of the A/C humming at its highest setting. I turn in bed, trying to conjure some semblance of that haven, with its knee-high grass brushing my legs, to no avail. For all my life, Home has been a foreign concept. I have had my moments where its warmth seems within my reach, but they were never long enough for me to claim them.

It's too late to pluck at the stars in my mind, burned away by my awakening, so I settle for a yawn as I stretch my arms above my head. When I stand up, my world tilts for a second before I'm introduced to the bareness of my bedroom walls. I never decorated them, never felt like they were mine to own. They're beige, cold, and boring as a snowless winter. The only thing that graces them is a collage of photos from memories I can barely recall. Some of them aren't even mine. There's a photo my mother took of a butterfly, a photo of her in a cave mouth in a faraway land called California. I was nothing but a breath in the universe when she took them. There's a photograph of my old best friend and I when we were kids, some ribbons from horse-riding competitions that I do remember but no longer consider a part of my life, if only for their lack of effect on my future. I often look at them, reach my hands up to touch the collage, but my fingers could care less. They do not have the desire to seek something so far behind my current self, focused on an evermoving present. On my other wall is another collage, fraying, falling apart, phrases of humor dancing across the green background. It's a recount of my years in marching band, from the beginnings when I still fell for the "your plume is backwards" jokes to the year I made my last one. I suppose these collages were once my Homes, but they were always tainted by time, the reminder that they wouldn't be my Home forever. Time has only solidified that fact. I feel like I'm standing on a cliff edge overlooking the fields of my life, but I can't go back, lest I fall too deeply into the past and forget where I'm going, not that I really know in the first place.

The chill of my air conditioning abruptly shutting off is the only thing that pushes me on. I shift into the emptiness of my dorm room and slowly turn around. It's emptier than my room at home, no collages in sight. My only wall decoration sits in a basket under the bed, though it's not really my bed this time. The bedding is mine, the pillow, and even the rug I'm feeling under my feet belongs to my person, but they are only fragments of attempts at making a Home. Nothing makes me feel like I can have a future here. I'd abandoned the superficial attempt as soon as I realized it would lead to nothing but things thrown around a place. There are hearts carved into the walls, and I wonder if the previous people who inhabited this space were also searching for a Home in the paint-covered cracks by making their own markings. I look closer at the hearts only to see that paint has covered those, too.

I cut the lights as I leave the uncomfortable warmth of my dorm, shutting the lonely place behind my broken door. The halls of the residential building welcome me with signs advertising events that have passed and events that are coming up. Just like my previous Homes, these flyers advertising expired events have faded into the background, reduced to insignificance. There are some I remember fondly, those which conjure a feeling of nostalgia. The others fade ever more, either because they never felt like Home, or they are too far beyond the scope of my mind that they don't hold a presence anymore. My eyes pass over most of them, only a few of the flyers catch my eye, and they're mostly the ones that advertise the future. I've always carefully kept my gaze toward the future, toward the Home I want to make rather than the Homes I've lost. Maybe that's why I don't think I've ever had one. When the mind is so preoccupied with what she doesn't have, she will never notice what she does, and so on and so on.

The residence hallway is growing smaller the farther I go, the flyers disappearing before my eyes can focus on any one of them. I finally emerge outside. The meadow is back. This time, instead of stars dotting the sky there is a moon, iridescent and soft, a comforting presence in the otherwise unsettling environment. It beckons, pulling me closer to something in the distance, the sound of light laughter, of dishes dinging together. But the source of the sound is nowhere to be seen, the meadow as taunting as when the stars, windows of Homes, flooded the sky. I look for maybe a cottage inspired by Thomas Kinkade staring back at me, a cozy apartment with large windows overlooking a city, or for people I love who will tell me what time it is so I know just how long I have to write before I need to sleep, but I find nothing. The lingering echoes of the sounds trigger an explosion in my mind as I try to solidify this torturous dream, create a house that feels akin to my heart, for people I know won't leave me, but the moon whispers and simply says, "Wait a little longer moonchild, you will earn your Home." I don't want to, I want Home to be something easy to access,

familiar and unwavering, but the moon's tinkling laugh lets me know that all I have to go back to now is a seat in the waiting room. I imagine a figurative woman at the reception desk calling me over just to let me know I'll be waiting another few minutes, and I drag my figurative feet back to the figurative chair and close my eyes. When I open them, I'm back in front of my dorm.

The air smells fresh today, like autumn had been chasing summer and finally won. The brown leaves on the brick pathways crunch joyfully under my feet as I leave my dorm behind. I check the time on my phone. Time, ever the enemy, the friend, keeps knocking around my skull and asking me to move on, telling me that I don't have time to worry about such things when class is in three minutes. I can't help it though. The closer I get to adulthood, the kind where you're left utterly alone in the world, the harder I think about finding a Home in a world meant for hotels. I have two and a half more years before checkout.

Once I sat down in class, I wanted to see how someone else felt about the concept, whether Home was physical, mental, or if they were in the same boat as me, floating on an endless sea, searching for at least an island to host them for a while. I wasn't surprised when the answer I received was not a place at all, but the people who surround them. That seems to be the second most frequent answer I've come across, as if Home is not meant to be something that stays, but someone who can move and breathe, a support system of sorts. And perhaps a part of me can agree that Home is not a stagnant thing. It's something I wish I could believe, but my friends, like Home, don't feel permanent. They feel more like grains of sand falling through my fingers. They're the one thing I'll pick up if I lose them, but they aren't Home.

When I was a kid, I wasn't concerned with things like Home. I don't think I fully understood what it meant because Home was as simple as a house in my eyes. I know I wanted stability, somewhere safe that I could retreat to if my anxiety climbed too high, and I suppose to some, it could be considered a Home. Unfortunately, my mind has always been filled to the brim with other concerns. As a child, it burst with dreams that were constantly interrupted by muted arguments between two people who shouldn't have been together in a house that was too small for their taut intolerance. I tried to turn the volume of my dreams up, but their pitches matched and exceeded, and I was helpless with no choice but to allow their voices to create a looming static that never fully left. It got to the point where I gave up drowning the noise out with distractions and embraced it. By the time I started to question what Home was, I asked myself, "If this was supposed to be Home, did I want it? Did I want to be surrounded by air that tasted like barely concealed misery?" I didn't, and I certainly don't now. When one-half of the problem finally left for good, the house felt lighter, but by

no means did I love it. Home is nothing if not love, and I'd wager I haven't loved something enough to call it a Home yet. I don't think I've ever had a chance. I was walking through fog until we moved, and even when I could see a fresh start in front of me in the form of one of those happy, nuclear family houses, a pain I was just starting to understand as grief lingered.

I've carried that grief throughout my life, though it has changed shape over time into something that I insist is nonchalance, as if I don't care that the very foundation of what Home could be didn't slip out from under me before I was strong enough to catch it. I don't dwell on it often. I opt instead for trying to create a Home through my friends or my dorm, even though it never really works because I know how impermanent both things are, but every attempt brings me closer to the Home I yearn for, so I never stop because "practice makes perfect" even if it feels futile sometimes. The past holds little comfort to me, and I know this supposed nonchalance I insist upon is a wily excuse to dismiss grief, but right now, I don't care. I can't. The only comfort I take from is the comfort of my future, something I can create for myself, a Home that is wholly me. Maybe then I'll finally confront my shadow and stomp it out for good. I laugh at the sentiment since a shadow can never truly be stomped out. It can be hidden, twisted into something it's not, but it doesn't go away. Still, it feels good to consider it.

I've made it halfway across campus before I remember to remind myself that that part of my past doesn't matter anymore. The wind fights against me, my wind, my leaves. I know nature is not owned by anyone, not truly, but it feels like mine in the moment and for one second, I feel lighter. At the very least, it blows away unwanted thoughts and emotions. My thoughts return to the possibilities of Home, the hope that never goes away that I'll find it somewhere. For now, I have my friends and a bed that isn't mine, and I make the most of it.

CRITICAL WRITING

Into the Lake: A Craft Analysis of Joy Harjo's "The Flood"

Daquinua Craig

The power of the victim is a power that will always be reckoned with, one way or the other. When the proverbial sixteen-year-old woman walked down to the lake within her were all sixteen-year-old women who had questioned their power from time immemorial.
-Joy Harjo, "The Flood"

Upon my first reading of "The Flood" by Joy Harjo, I was immediately enchanted by her use of language. I knew that I wanted to read it again and again—and like the young girl in the story, I found myself unable to resist temptation. For my analysis, I have chosen to study Joy Harjo in particular because of her fascinating writing style, and in this essay, I will discuss the craft elements of "The Flood" that make the story so captivating: the characterization, the main character's yearning, the plot, point of view, and setting, dialogue (or lack thereof), and language.

Joy Harjo's "The Flood" is a short story that acknowledges Indigenous culture lost to colonization. In it, a young girl, engrossed in the myths of her tribe, sees a creature called the "watersnake" or "watermonster" in every facet of life. As she grows older, however, she is damaged by this obsession and eventually abandons her heritage like the others around her have already begun to do. By the end of the story, the only one who still believes is the oldest woman in the tribe. Formerly deemed a wise elder, she is now just called crazy by the people who once looked up to her—a common element found in fairytales and myths.

There are only six concrete characters mentioned in the story: the narrator herself, her parents, her younger sister, the man her parents want her to marry, and the old woman. There is a 7th character, but it is an intangible one. "The watermonster, the snake who lived at the bottom of the lake" (Harjo), is a mythical creature, but to the young girl, he is a thing of many forms. In one moment, he is a force of nature, present "in the fight of lightning storms, breaking trees, stirring up killing winds"; in the next, he is a human man, "hidden in the blushing skin of the suddenly vulnerable" (Harjo). Like in many myths and legends, the main character is tasked to overcome him, but trying to do so only leads her further into her demise.

The only round character in the story is the narrator herself. Once an innocent young girl who lived by myth and legend, by the end of the story,

she has become a middle-aged woman who no longer believes in the tales she once adored. This has partly to do with her transition into womanhood, leading her to desert myth and embrace reality—but she is also heavily influenced by forces outside of her. There is also the old woman, who is not a round character, per se, because she does not change. By the end of the story, she is deemed crazy because she is the only one in town who still believes in the myths of the past. Although her character does not develop, she is still an integral part of the story—she herself remains stagnant, but what does change is the narrator's perception of her. Through this old woman, we get a better idea of what the narrator is like. I find it interesting that Harjo includes a simpler character to enhance the characterization of the narrator. Unlike the old woman, the main character has chosen to renounce the legend she once believed in—perhaps because feeding into the myth only led to misery, and she did not want to end up like the crazy lady.

"On fire with the explosion of womanhood" (a beautiful metaphor, might I add), the main character is tempted by desire (Harjo). The watersnake, who has taken the form of a human man, surfaces from the lake and seduces her—and she is unable to resist. Whether the man is actually a human manifestation of the watermonster or not is unknown, but it is not important. The state of his existence would not change the young girl's yearning. Surrendering to desire, she transforms into a version of herself that she is not proud of. Upset by the woman she has become, she drowns her regret in alcohol—and later, drowns herself in the same lake from which the object of her demise emerged.

Time passes in the story, but this is not elaborated on. The story begins when the narrator is sixteen and ends when she is older and hurrying away from the old woman in the convenience store—a woman she can no longer bear to see "as [she] had abandoned her some twenty years ago" (Harjo). With this, we can infer that by the end of the story, the narrator is at least in her late thirties. Though the exact dates of the story's events are unknown, they can also be estimated with the help of the third paragraph:

This story is not an accident, nor is the existence of the watersnake in the memory of the people as they carried the burden of the myth from Alabama to Oklahoma. Each reluctant step pounded memory into the broken heart and no one will ever forget it. (Harjo)

Through research, I discovered that Harjo is a member of the Muscogee Tribe, also known as "Creek" (Poetry Foundation). The Muscogee were a nation of Indigenous people who were originally from Alabama. During the Trail of Tears from 1830 to 1850, they were forcibly relocated to Oklahoma, along with four other tribes (National Geographic Society). Although time is not explicitly mentioned in "The Flood," we can deduce that the story takes place sometime

long after 1850. A clever craft technique, Harjo engages her readers by testing their knowledge of history.

The girl in this story, on the cusp of womanhood, is representative of the Muscogee people. Parallel to the girl, the tribe that once believed in myth and legend were stripped of their joy and forced to assimilate to Anglo culture. In my first few reads, I assumed that the girl was meant to represent Harjo herself, but in some ways, she is more like the old woman. Harjo tells this story to show how her people have lost the ways of tradition. Perhaps she tells this story in an attempt to help them find it again.

Harjo's story begins in a close-knit tribal area in Oklahoma and ends in that same space, reconstructed as a small town. Harjo's story "portrays and condemns the effects of the eradication of undomesticated wildness" (Bryson 172). There is another kind of parallel happening in the story; both the girl and her home are metamorphosing, and both are being forced to do so. By the end, the once natural, inviting, and free tribal village is only a ghost of what it used to be. A convenience store has been built in what is now considered a town, and instead of having to go to the river to get water, the narrator now goes to the store to get "bread, eggs, and the newspaper before breakfast" (Harjo).

The manner in which Harjo describes the main character's journey into womanhood alongside the transformation of her home is worthy of an essay of its own. Her language is very cryptic—a quality that I tend to admire in writing. The difficulty to decipher meaning intrigues me. But Harjo's words are not confusing just to be confusing; the complicated diction and syntax are purposeful, meant to pay homage to traditional myths and legends. In a way, the story could be considered a legend of its own.

I think Harjo's use of complicated language in her story represents a sort of rebellion against colonization and the erasure of Indigenous culture. In her act of defiance, Harjo deliberately withholds information from the reader, only giving them long, ambiguous sentences to be left to interpretation. What the girl sees at the lake is described as something "there were no words for except in the sacred language of the most holy recounting" (Harjo). She would only be able to explain what she witnessed in a language that is no longer used. Having long abandoned this mother tongue, even the girl's mother is unable to understand and can only "decipher...her burning lips as shame" (Harjo). Not only is this ironic, but it illustrates the loss of a beautiful dialect.

On the topic of dialect, the words we read throughout the story only come from the fragmented thoughts of the girl herself, and they are never spoken aloud. Harjo's choice to exclude dialogue in the story could also be viewed as an extension of her resistance to the Anglo language, but simultaneously, Harjo allows more focus to be put towards the main character and her situation as a

whole. Written from a first person point of view, the story is already emotionally intense, and the lack of dialogue forces the reader to be pulled further into the girl's internal struggle and emotional turmoil.

The girl's thoughts are arranged in 20 short paragraphs; each composed of long, winding sentences that contribute to the story's mythical nature. "Denied line-ends and visual stanzas, and forced to look within the structure for reliable support, readers navigate the text by constantly shifting their focus... no doubt pausing at times to circle back and test their tentative grasp of Harjo's meaning before proceeding further" (Johnson 17). Using this complex syntax, paired with its equally intricate twin, diction, Harjo is able to create a story that keeps her readers captivated. They have no choice but to read it several times over, only just to reach the tip of the iceberg—or in this case, the edge of the lake.

When combined, Harjo's chosen craft elements join together in the creation of a beautiful and timeless piece of work. Harjo's story itself has created a storm within me, pouring down creativity and flooding my mind with interest. Her words have inspired me to attempt using these same techniques in my own writing, in hopes that I will be able to emulate her style—and, along the way, find my own.

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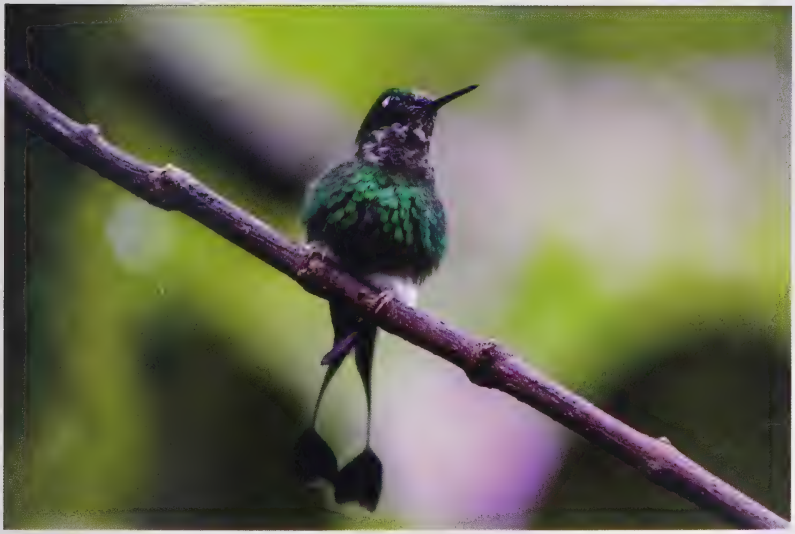
ART & DESIGN

Time is a Blur

Nathan Le
Photography

Frog Pondering

Finian Curran
Photography



Green Hummingbird

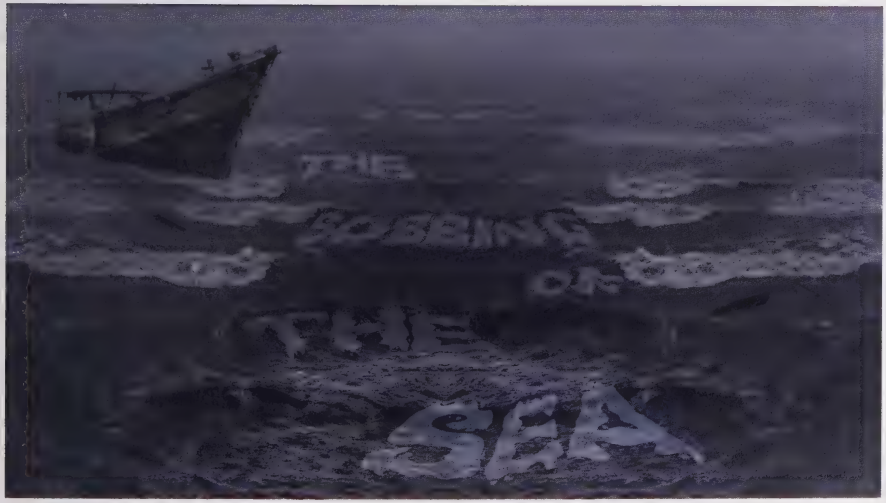
Mikaela Hall
Photography

Queen

Autumn Pointe
Oil on Wood Panel

Still Life

Sarah Sproles
Oil on Panel



The Sea Ghost
Margaret Bonds Symposium

Bella Swanson
Digital Illustration

Lily, 2023

Emily Walter
Digital Art

We Can Do It Lacrosse QR Code

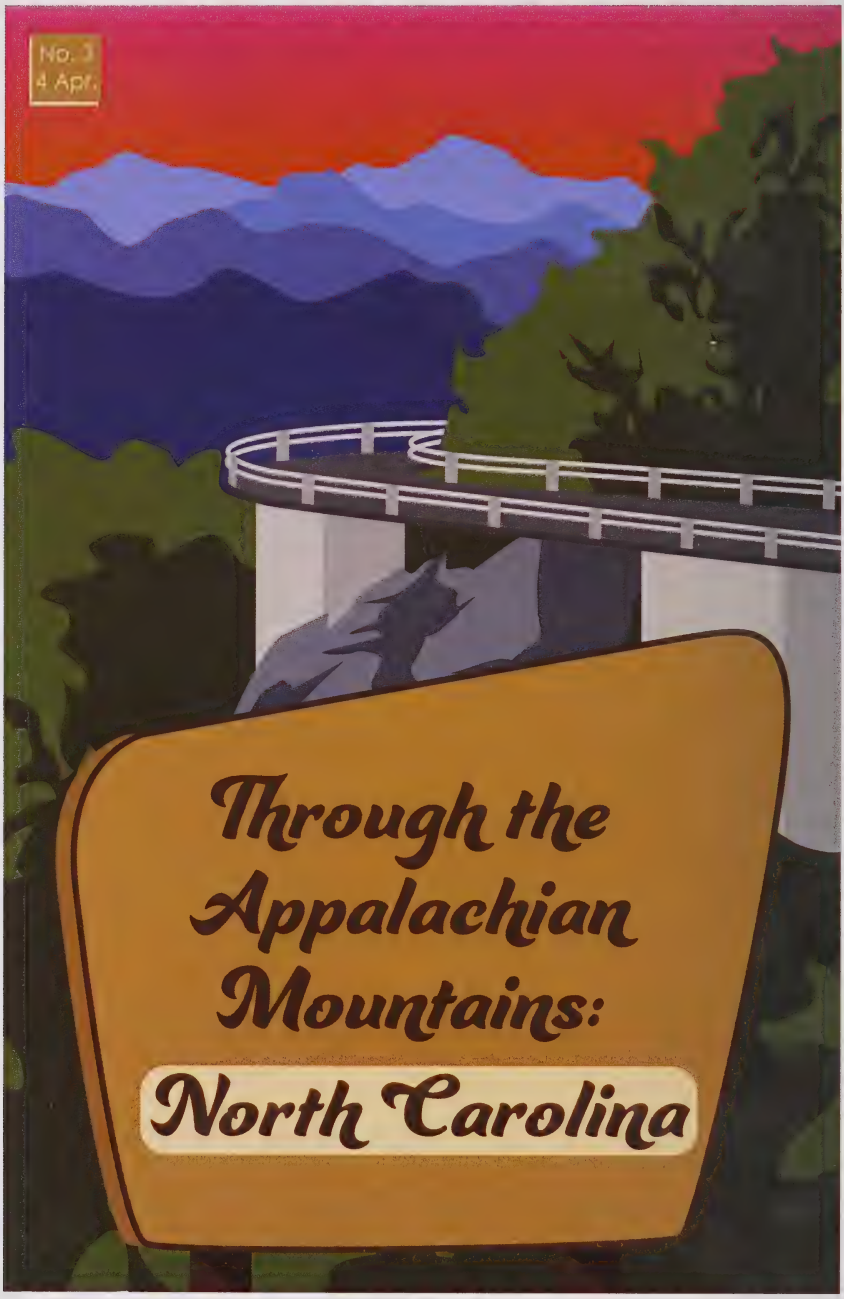
Bella Swanson
Diigtal Illustration

Lilium Type Specimen

Maddy Leone
Digital Illustration

Top Gun Maverick

Maddy Leone
Digital Illustration



Through the Appalachian Mountains: North Carolina

Allison Morton
Digital Illustration

Tribute to Mono Feo

Grem McIntosh
Digital Art

Ivy Characters Sketches

Emily Walter
Digital Art

Alcoholic Drink Character Desgins

Emily Walter
Digital Art

Vietnamese Card Deck

Nathan Le
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Lemons

Allison Morton
Woodcut Print

Two-Headed Hare

Allison Morton
Intaglio Print

Self-Portrait

Sarah Sproles
Pencil Drawing

Pig-Duck

Maddy Leone
Pencil Drawing

Cylinder

Allison Morton
Soda Fired Stoneware

Cylinder

Martyna Bugala
Wood Fired Stoneware

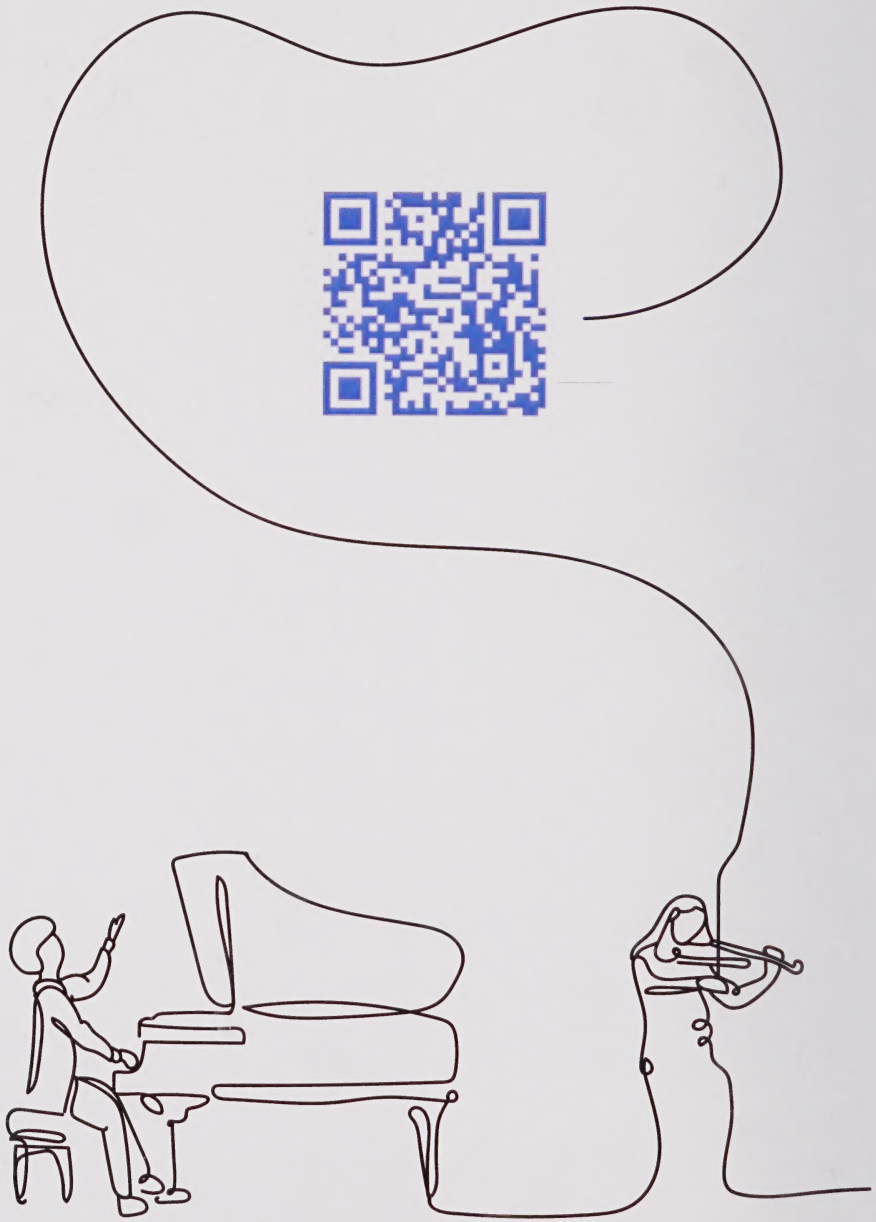
"Globo o Huevo"

Valentina Gil Giron
Wood Fired Stoneware

MUSIC & MULTIMEDIA

Tremor & Gale

Aria DiLoreto and Donovan Perkins



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